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Tamilla Vahabova	RESEARCH ARTICLE  The Pedagogical and Intellectual Perspectives of Azerbaijani Enlighteners on the Role of Women in Society and the Development of Women's Education in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries Dr. Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University Azerbaijan E-mail: tamilla.vahabova@adpu.edu.az; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4984-3140
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Abstract The article analyzes and comparatively evaluates the views of prominent Azerbaijani educators and intellectuals regarding the role of women in society and the importance of women's education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period represented a crucial stage in the cultural and intellectual revival of Azerbaijani society. Progressive thinkers and educators of the time recognized that one of the fundamental causes of social backwardness in many Muslim societies, including Azerbaijan, was the exclusion of women from modern education and public life. Azerbaijani intellectuals argued that the progress of the nation and the development of society were impossible without the education and enlightenment of women. The study examines the activities and ideas of leading representatives of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, including Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Hasan bey Zardabi, Mahammad Shakhtakhti, Sultan Majid Ganizade, Ahmad bey Agaev, Ali bey Huseynzade, Jalil Mammadguluzade, Uzeir Hajibeyov, Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli, Mahammad Hadi and other prominent thinkers. Particular attention is paid to their contributions to the establishment of girls' schools and their efforts to promote modern educational institutions for women. The article also provides information about both public and private girls' schools that were established during this period and analyzes the intellectual debates surrounding the development of national educational institutions for women. The work highlights the influence of European pedagogical thought and compares the views of Azerbaijani educators with those of well-known European pedagogues. The findings demonstrate that the struggle for women's education was a key element of the Azerbaijani national renaissance and played a crucial role in shaping the modern educational system of the country.	
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Research Methodology

The research employs several complementary scientific methods, including theoretical analysis, the historical-comparative method, and the examination of archival materials.

The method of theoretical analysis made it possible to systematize and generalize various sources reflecting the issue of women's education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These sources include periodical press materials, literary works, journalistic essays, personal correspondence of intellectuals, scientific and philosophical treatises, and educational textbooks of the period.

The historical-comparative method was used to analyze the development of women's education in Azerbaijan within a broader international context. In particular, the educational conditions of women in the Islamic world were compared with those in

Russia and Europe. This approach allowed the identification of significant educational disparities and demonstrated that the exclusion of women from formal education was one of the important factors contributing to social and cultural stagnation in many Muslim societies of that period.

The research also relied on archival documents preserved in several important repositories, including:

- the Central State Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan
- the Azerbaijan State Archive
- the Institute of Manuscripts of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan
- the Museum of Public Education
- the State Archive of Georgia

These archival materials provide valuable historical evidence regarding the activities and educational initiatives of Azerbaijani educators and reformers.

Intellectual and Pedagogical Context

In order to provide a broader comparative perspective, the article also considers the ideas of influential European and Russian educators whose pedagogical theories shaped modern educational thought. Among them are:

- John Amos Comenius
- Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- Adolph Diesterweg
- Konstantin Ushinsky
- Anton Makarenko
- Vasily Sukhomlinsky

The ideas of these educators, particularly regarding universal education, child development, and the role of education in social progress, had a considerable influence on the pedagogical thinking of Azerbaijani intellectuals.

Previous Research on the Problem

The issue of women's education in Azerbaijan has attracted the attention of a number of scholars who examined different aspects of the problem. Among those who made valuable contributions to the study of the pedagogical heritage of Azerbaijani educators are Professors M. Muradkhanov, A. Seidov, M. Mehdizade, H. Akhmadov, A. Khashimov, A. Agaev, A. Tagiev, S. Khalilov, S. Mammadov, Z. Akhundova, I. Isaev, and S. Orukov.

These scholars have explored the educational activities of Azerbaijani intellectuals, their pedagogical meetings, and their contributions to the development of national education in Azerbaijan. However, despite these valuable studies, the problem of women's education in Azerbaijan has not yet been investigated as a comprehensive and systematic subject within the framework of pedagogical science.

Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by examining the issue as a holistic research object, integrating historical, pedagogical, and sociocultural perspectives.

Relevance of the Topic

Throughout human history, the status and social role of women have differed significantly across societies and cultures. In some societies women were deprived of basic rights and treated as secondary members of society, while in others they enjoyed equal rights with men or even held a more prominent position. Historical examples of such differences can be observed in various civilizations, including societies that developed during or after the matriarchal period.

Women constitute nearly half of the population in every society. Consequently, their participation in social, cultural, and economic life plays a decisive role in the overall development of communities and nations. Their importance becomes even more evident when considering their central role in the upbringing and education of future generations.

Within the family structure, the responsibility for raising children traditionally falls largely on mothers. As a result, the level of women's education directly affects the intellectual and moral development of society. A well-educated and culturally developed woman is capable of raising socially responsible, morally conscious, and intellectually competent children who can contribute positively to society and humanity as a whole.

For this reason, the education of women has historically been one of the main priorities of progressive and civilized societies.

The Role of Women in Azerbaijani Historical and Cultural Thought

The Azerbaijani people are an integral part of the broader human civilization. Throughout the history of this nation, the role and social status of women have evolved under different political, cultural, and religious circumstances.

One of the important tasks of contemporary social sciences, including pedagogy, is to examine these historical transformations and identify how attitudes toward women have influenced social development. Studying such processes both historically and in modern contexts is essential for learning from past experiences, correcting previous mistakes, and shaping future progress (Mikayilli, 2025).

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented a particularly significant period in Azerbaijani intellectual history. This era is often described as the period of the Azerbaijani national renaissance. One of the central issues of this period was the problem of education, especially women's education.

Progressive Azerbaijani thinkers clearly understood that without the intellectual and cultural development of women it would be impossible to achieve the full progress of the nation. Women represented more than half of the national community, and their education was considered a key factor for the future prosperity of society.

Cultural Traditions and the Image of Women in Azerbaijani Heritage

It should also be noted that in the traditional Azerbaijani ethnocultural worldview women were often treated with respect and dignity. Evidence of this can be found in folklore, classical literature, and historical narratives.

One of the most important cultural monuments of the Azerbaijani people, the epic *The Book of Dede Korkut*, portrays women as wise, courageous, and honorable figures who play significant roles within the family and society.

Similarly, many classical Azerbaijani poets and thinkers presented highly positive images of women in their literary works. Among them are:

- Nizami Ganjavi
- Shah Ismail Khatai
- Muhammad Fuzuli
- Molla Panah Vagif

In their works women are depicted as intelligent, virtuous, beautiful, and morally strong individuals who occupy an honorable place in society.

The Social Reality of Women in the Late Nineteenth Century

Despite these cultural ideals, the actual social conditions of women in Azerbaijan during the second half of the nineteenth century were often very different. In reality, women faced serious limitations in terms of education, social participation, and personal freedom.

Such limitations were not unique to Azerbaijan but were characteristic of many regions of the Muslim world during that period. Women were frequently excluded from formal education and confined to domestic roles, which significantly restricted their opportunities for intellectual and social development (Mikayilli, 2025).

Although Islamic teachings emphasize equality and human dignity, historical interpretations and social practices often diverged from these principles. The Qur'an and Islamic ethical teachings contain numerous provisions emphasizing justice, respect, and human dignity regardless of gender. However, in many societies traditional interpretations and conservative attitudes led to restrictions on women's participation in education and public life.

As a result, the lack of educational opportunities for women became one of the factors contributing to the broader intellectual and social stagnation observed in many Muslim societies during the nineteenth century.

The Struggle for Women's Education in the Azerbaijani Enlightenment Movement

Beginning from the 1850s, one of the most influential representatives of Azerbaijani enlightenment thought, Mirza Fatali Akhundov, initiated an intellectual struggle against the social and cultural barriers that prevented women from participating in education and public life. Akhundov regarded the exclusion of women from education as one of the major obstacles hindering the intellectual and cultural progress of society. Through his literary works, philosophical writings, and public commentary, he attempted to challenge traditional prejudices and expose the ignorance and narrow-mindedness that characterized the prevailing attitudes toward women in many Eastern societies (Mikayilli, 2025).

In his dramatic works, Akhundov often used satire and humor to criticize social ignorance, superstition, and the limited worldview that confined women to a marginalized role in society. However, in his more serious philosophical writings, particularly in his famous work *Letters to the Prince of Persia*, he addressed the problem of women's oppression and legal inequality in a more direct and analytical manner. Akhundov emphasized that the liberation and education of women were essential conditions for the social and cultural advancement of Eastern societies. According to him, the removal of ignorance and the establishment of modern education would inevitably lead to the emancipation of women and the transformation of society (Ahmadov, 2025).

The importance of women's education was also highlighted in a letter dated January 1, 1877, written by Akhundov and addressed to Hasan bey Zardabi. This letter was later published in the newspaper *Akinchi* under the pseudonym "*Nationalist-Advocate-Unknown*." In this text, the author emphasized that the progress of the Azerbaijani nation could not be achieved without the widespread dissemination of education among the population. The letter argued that the ideals of national progress could only become a reality when even the most ordinary members of society were able to read, write, and acquire knowledge. In other words, literacy and education were seen as the foundation of national development.

Hasan bey Zardabi, as a visionary intellectual and committed public figure, shared these progressive views and actively worked toward their implementation both theoretically and practically. The newspaper *Akinchi*, which he founded and edited between 1875 and 1877, played a decisive role in promoting enlightenment ideas in Azerbaijani society. The publication addressed a wide range of social, cultural, and educational issues related to national revival and progress. Among these issues, the education and upbringing of women occupied a particularly important place.

In one of the issues of *Akinchi*, published on July 11, 1876, the participation of women in social life was discussed as an urgent issue of contemporary society. The newspaper emphasized that the future of society largely depended on the proper upbringing and education of the younger generation. Since the first stage of this upbringing takes place within the family, both parents—mother and father—bear equal responsibility for the moral and intellectual development of their children.

The newspaper highlighted that a well-educated mother plays an especially crucial role in the upbringing of children. Since children spend their early years primarily under the care of their mothers, the intellectual and moral level of the mother directly influences the formation of the child's character and worldview. Therefore, the education of women was considered not merely a private family matter but a significant social issue affecting the future of the entire nation (Ahmadov, 2026).

Another article published in the same issue of *Akinchi*, under the heading "Science News," discussed the development of European-style educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire, including modern military and secular schools. The newspaper argued that the expansion of such institutions greatly contributed to the intellectual development of society. In this context, it was emphasized that the early upbringing of children occurs primarily under the supervision of the mother. Consequently, if mothers themselves lack education and intellectual development, it becomes difficult to ensure the proper upbringing of the next generation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, discussions about women's education continued in the Azerbaijani press. For example, in 1903, Hasan bey Zardabi published an article in the newspaper *Kaspi* titled "*On the Project of a New Female Educational Institution*." In this article, he critically evaluated the project proposed by A. N. Saparov regarding the establishment of the second girls' gymnasium in Baku. While acknowledging the importance of such initiatives, Zardabi pointed out several shortcomings in the proposed plan and offered valuable suggestions aimed at improving the organization and effectiveness of female educational institutions.

Zardabi himself made practical attempts to promote women's education. Recognizing the urgent need for educational opportunities for Azerbaijani girls, he attempted to open a school for Muslim girls in Baku. On January 19, 1896, he officially appealed to the Baku governor requesting permission to establish a three-year school for Muslim girls. However, the proposal was rejected by the authorities on the grounds that Zardabi was considered "politically unreliable." Despite this setback, his initiative became an important symbol of the struggle for women's education in Azerbaijan.

Following the tradition established by *Akinchi*, the newspaper *Ziya* continued to address issues related to education and social progress. Although the publication did not consistently focus on women's education, it nevertheless emphasized that the lack of educational opportunities for girls was one of the key reasons behind the social and cultural backwardness of Azerbaijani society. The newspaper argued that without the education of women it would be impossible to achieve genuine national progress.

Another prominent figure who addressed the issue of women's education was Mahammad Shakhtakhti. In his influential work *How to Save Turkey*, Shakhtakhti examined the social problems that hindered the modernization of Eastern societies. Among these problems he identified the unequal status of women and the widespread restrictions placed upon their rights and freedoms. According to Shakhtakhti, the subordinate position of women in society and the persistence of practices such as polygamy undermined the stability and moral foundations of the family.

He argued that meaningful social reform required the elimination of these discriminatory practices and the establishment of equal rights for women. Only by improving the social and educational status of women could society ensure the healthy development of the family and the nation as a whole.

In a series of articles titled "Daily Notes," published in the newspaper *Eastern Russian* in 1904, Shakhhtakhtli compared the status of women in Eastern societies with the social and legal position of women in Europe. He urged Eastern societies to learn from the successful experience of European countries, where women enjoyed greater educational opportunities and social freedoms. According to him, the modernization of society required the recognition of women's rights and their active participation in public life (Hamidova, 2026).

Shakhhtakhtli particularly emphasized the decisive role of mothers in the upbringing of children. He argued that the intellectual and moral qualities of the mother significantly influence the formation of the child's personality. Therefore, the education and intellectual development of women should be regarded as a national priority. In his view, the future salvation and progress of society depended on the liberation of women from ignorance, illiteracy, and restrictive social norms.

The importance of mothers in the educational process was also emphasized by Nariman Narimanov and Najaf bey Vezirov. In a letter published in the newspaper *Yeni Fikir* on September 18, 1911, Vezirov stressed that the moral and intellectual development of the nation was closely connected with the education of mothers. According to him, an educated mother was capable of raising a generation of enlightened and responsible citizens.

Despite these progressive ideas, the real educational opportunities for Azerbaijani girls in the nineteenth century remained extremely limited. Following medieval traditions, most girls were deprived of access to formal education. In rare cases, daughters of wealthy families or high-ranking officials could receive private instruction at home. For the majority of Muslim girls, however, education was limited to elementary religious instruction provided by local mullahs. In such settings, girls usually studied basic reading, writing, and the recitation of the Qur'an.

Even this limited form of education was available only to a small minority of girls. Sometimes instruction took place in traditional religious schools (maktabs), while in other cases girls were taught privately at home. Occasionally girls attended classes together with boys, but separate educational institutions for girls were extremely rare.

Statistical data from the mid-nineteenth century illustrate the extent of this educational disparity. According to reports from 1851, in Baku there were 82 individuals who had received formal religious education and 91 individuals who had obtained advanced religious instruction, all of whom were men. Women were almost completely absent from this educational sphere.

Nevertheless, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the gradual emergence of educational initiatives aimed at improving the situation. One of the earliest attempts to establish a girls' school in Azerbaijan occurred in 1896 in Nakhchivan. Although the school faced strong opposition from conservative religious circles, it managed to function for some time and became an important example of early educational reform (Ahmadov, 2026).

Another significant initiative was undertaken by Jalil Mammadguluzade. When he became the principal of a school in the village of Nehram in 1893, he encouraged the enrollment of girls in the school. Within a short time eight girls began attending classes, and in 1894 a separate class for girls was opened. Similar efforts were made in the town of Sheki, where progressive teachers attempted to introduce modern educational practices.

In these schools teachers paid particular attention not only to academic instruction but also to the moral education of girls. The curriculum emphasized values such as patriotism, respect for the people, honesty, modesty, kindness, and social responsibility. Teachers also attempted to establish cooperation between schools and families in order to strengthen the educational process (Hamidova, 2026).

Although many of these early schools operated only for a short period due to financial difficulties and social resistance, they played an important role in stimulating educational reforms. These initiatives contributed to the emergence of the "Usul-i Jadid" (new method) movement and helped revitalize intellectual and educational life in Azerbaijan.

Following the incorporation of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the imperial administration gradually established a network of Russian-language educational institutions throughout the region. These schools were initially designed to serve the political and administrative interests of the empire, and most of them were open primarily to boys. However, over time the need for female education also began to be recognized (Hamidova, 2026).

One of the earliest institutions of this type was opened in Tbilisi on May 5, 1846, followed by another girls' school on May 14, 1847, established under the initiative of the St. Nina Women's Charitable Society and supported by the wife of the Caucasus governor, Y. K. Vorontsova. These institutions represented the first attempts to introduce European-style female education in the Caucasus.

Shortly afterward, on April 30, 1848, another Russian girls' school was opened in Shamakhi under the patronage of the same charitable organization. This institution became the first European-style educational establishment for girls within the territory of Azerbaijan.

However, these schools primarily served girls from non-Muslim communities, including Russians, Armenians, Georgians, and Jews. Azerbaijani Muslim girls were largely excluded from these educational opportunities, and many families continued to rely on traditional religious instruction (Mikayilli, 2025).

In 1867, a girls' school was opened in Ganja with reduced tuition fees in order to allow children from poorer families to attend. Founded by M. Yengibarova, the school provided basic education and Russian-language instruction for girls.

Another significant development occurred in 1874, when an independent girls' gymnasium was established in Baku on the basis of the St. Nina educational institution. In 1880, an additional eighth pedagogical class was introduced in the gymnasium to train future female teachers. By the academic year 1896–1897, the institution had 576 students. However, the ethnic composition of the student body clearly reflected the existing social inequalities: 313 students were Russian and 134 Armenian, while only one Azerbaijani girl was enrolled.

Additional girls' schools were opened in Shusha in 1875 and Ganja in 1885, and by 1889 the latter had been transformed into a gymnasium. Nevertheless, Azerbaijani Muslim girls remained severely underrepresented in these institutions.

Gradually, however, the number of Azerbaijani girls receiving secular education began to increase. Statistical data from 1876 indicate that 647 students in the Iravan–Ganja region and 376 students in the Baku–Dagestan region were enrolled in schools administered by the Department of Public Education. Although girls constituted only a small proportion of these students, these figures nevertheless demonstrate the gradual expansion of educational opportunities.

These early educational initiatives laid the foundation for the development of modern female education in Azerbaijan and played a crucial role in the broader intellectual and cultural transformation of Azerbaijani society.

The Expansion of the Women's Education Movement in Azerbaijan at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Beginning in the 1870s, the idea of establishing a separate educational institution for Muslim girls began to emerge within the socio-pedagogical discourse of Azerbaijani intellectual life. One of the earliest proponents of this initiative was Hanifa Malikova-Abaeva, the wife of the prominent Azerbaijani educator and journalist Hasan bey Zardabi. Evidence of this initiative can be found in a report published in the newspaper *Qafqaz* (No. 134, 1872), which mentioned the proposal to establish a school specifically intended for Muslim girls.

However, the realization of this initiative faced considerable obstacles. The policies of the Tsarist administration in the Caucasus did not favor the independent development of educational institutions for the Muslim population, particularly those that could promote cultural and intellectual autonomy. As a result, despite the progressive nature of the proposal, the plan to establish a girls' school could not be implemented at that time.

Nevertheless, the idea continued to gain support among intellectual and religious circles. By the 1890s, the proposal for Muslim girls' education began to receive attention even among certain representatives of the religious establishment, including the Caucasian Mufti and the Sheikh-ul-Islam. Their cautious support indicated a gradual transformation in attitudes toward female education within the Muslim community of the Caucasus.

The importance of this issue was also emphasized by the well-known Azerbaijani educator and literary critic Firidun bey Kocharli. In his article *"The Status of Women and the Education of Muslim Children,"* published in the newspaper *New Review* (No. 4115), Kocharli argued that the establishment of schools for Muslim girls would mark a turning point in the cultural history of the Muslim population of the Caucasus. According to him, "the opening of a school for Muslim girls will be the beginning of a new era in the history of Muslims in the Caucasus."

Despite such progressive aspirations, the establishment of a separate Muslim girls' school remained unattainable throughout most of the nineteenth century. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly in 1901, did the first successful initiatives in this direction finally materialize.

The Role of the Azerbaijani Enlightenment Press in Promoting Women's Education

From the perspective of Azerbaijani literary, cultural, and pedagogical thought, progressive attitudes toward women began to expand gradually from the mid-nineteenth century onward. However, it was during the early twentieth century that the issue of women's education became a central topic within the discourse of the Azerbaijani intellectual elite.

A particularly important role in promoting these ideas was played by influential literary and socio-political publications of the period. Among these publications, the satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin* and the intellectual journal *Fuyuzat* occupied a prominent place in the socio-cultural and pedagogical life of Azerbaijan.

The magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, founded and edited by Jalil Mammadguluzade, and the journal *Fuyuzat*, edited by Ali bey Huseynzade, played an invaluable role in the intellectual awakening of Azerbaijani society during the early twentieth century. These publications served as important platforms for the dissemination of enlightenment ideas, the development of national consciousness, and the promotion of progressive social reforms.

Intellectuals associated with these journals actively addressed the issue of women's education and the broader social position of Muslim women. They regarded the liberation and education of women as a crucial component of national progress and cultural modernization. Through articles, essays, satire, and literary works, they sought to raise public awareness about the necessity of educational reform and gender equality.

The Representation of Women's Issues in the Magazine *Molla Nasreddin*

The satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin* published numerous articles and literary works addressing the urgent social problems associated with women's status and education. Jalil Mammadguluzade himself devoted several influential writings to this topic, including articles such as "*Past Days*" (1906), "*Armenian and Muslim Orthodoxy*" (1907), "*Two Open Letters to the Sheikh-ul-Islam of the Caucasus*" (1907), and "*Ladies*" (1907). Other articles, including "*Myrtle-Myrtle*," "*Zina*," and "*Question of Law*," also examined the social and moral dilemmas affecting women in Muslim society.

In addition to his journalistic work, Mammadguluzade addressed the issue of women's oppression in several literary works, including *The History of the Village of Danabash* and the tragicomedy *The Dead*. In these works, the author depicted the difficult and often tragic conditions faced by Muslim women with profound emotional sensitivity and strong civic engagement.

The theme of women's emancipation and education also occupied a central place in the works of other writers associated with the *Molla Nasreddin* movement. Among them were prominent intellectuals such as Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Omar Faig Nemanzade, Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev, and several other poets and publicists.

Mirza Alakbar Sabir, in particular, addressed the issue of women's freedom in several satirical poems published in *Molla Nasreddin*. Among these works are "*Advice to a Muslim Girl*" (1906), "*The Daughter of the Infidel*" (1908), "*Spirited Away*," and "*The King of the Rings, My Heart of Sorrow*." In these poems Sabir created vivid and realistic portraits of women who suffered under the weight of social injustice, ignorance, and restrictive traditions.

The writers associated with *Molla Nasreddin* sought to portray the everyday life of Muslim women in all its complexity. Through satire, criticism, and literary imagery, they illustrated the various challenges faced by women in family life, social relations, marriage, and education. Their works explored the psychological world of women, their aspirations, frustrations, and hopes, as well as the societal attitudes that shaped their lives.

The authors argued that the widespread ignorance, illiteracy, and social restrictions imposed upon women not only harmed individual lives but also posed a serious threat to the future development of society. If women continued to remain marginalized and deprived of education, the intellectual and moral future of the nation itself would be endangered. Therefore, they concluded that the only viable solution was to liberate women from social oppression and provide them with access to modern education.

Women's Education in the Intellectual Program of the Journal *Fuyuzat*

Although both *Molla Nasreddin* and *Fuyuzat* shared a common objective of promoting social progress and enlightenment, their approaches to the issue of women's education differed in style and methodology.

Molla Nasreddin primarily relied on satire, humor, and sharp criticism to expose social injustices and traditional prejudices. In contrast, *Fuyuzat* addressed these issues through a more analytical, philosophical, and intellectual discourse.

One of the most prominent advocates of women's education within the *Fuyuzat* circle was Ali bey Huseynzade, one of the leading ideologists of modern Azerbaijani political thought. In his writings, including the series of articles published between 1908 and 1910 in newspapers such as *Irshad*, *Tarakki*, and others, Huseynzade examined the social and political problems facing the Muslim and Turkic world.

Among the many issues he discussed, the question of women's education occupied a particularly important place. Huseynzade argued that the intellectual and cultural development of Muslim societies was impossible without the education of women. He described the miserable social conditions faced by many Muslim women and emphasized that the progress of society depended on their emancipation and education.

Referring to Islamic sources, including Qur'anic teachings and prophetic traditions, he emphasized that the pursuit of knowledge was an obligation for both men and women. Therefore, he called for the establishment of modern schools for girls throughout Muslim societies and urged intellectuals to promote educational reform.

The journal *Fuyuzat* also published several important articles devoted specifically to women's education. Among these were works such as "*Baku Muslim School of Communications*" (1906), "*The Society of Circumcision Letters in Baku*" (1906), and Mahammad Hadi's article "*The Renaissance of Azerbaijani Women in Islam*" (1907). Other contributors, including Hassan Sabri Ayyazov and S. F. Simzali, also wrote about the social and cultural significance of women's education.

These publications played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and promoting the idea that the education of women was not merely a private or family matter but a fundamental requirement for national progress and modernization.

The Institutionalization of Women's Education in Azerbaijan in the Early Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, significant and practical steps were undertaken to expand educational opportunities for Azerbaijani girls and to establish educational institutions specifically designed for female students. These initiatives represented an important turning point in the development of women's education in Azerbaijan and marked the transition from theoretical discussions about women's rights to the practical implementation of educational reforms (Mardanov, 2011; Rustamov, 2006).

One of the most remarkable achievements of this period was the establishment of the first secular school for Muslim girls in the Caucasus region. This institution, known as the Russian-Muslim Girls' School, was officially opened in Baku on October 7, 1901. The creation of this school became possible primarily due to the financial support, organizational efforts, and persistent advocacy of the prominent Azerbaijani philanthropist and industrialist Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. Taghiyev not only financed the construction and operation of the school but also engaged in a long and difficult struggle with the imperial authorities in order to obtain official permission for its establishment. Historical sources indicate that this struggle began as early as 1896, several years before the school was finally opened (Mardanov, 2011; Mammadov, 1996).

The opening of the Russian-Muslim Girls' School in Baku represented a major milestone in the history of education in Azerbaijan. For the first time, Muslim girls were given access to a structured educational environment that combined elements of modern European pedagogy with instruction adapted to the cultural context of the Muslim population. The school soon became a symbol of educational reform and inspired similar initiatives in other regions of Azerbaijan.

Parallel developments occurred in other cities of the country. In the first years of the twentieth century, two Russian-Tatar girls' schools were established in the city of Ganja, which was one of the important cultural and educational centers of the region. Archival materials show that by 1904, approximately 40 Azerbaijani girls were studying at the first Russian-Tatar girls' school, which had been opened in 1901 in the city garden area (Mammadov, 1996). During the same period, the second Russian-Tatar girls' school enrolled 21 students, demonstrating a gradual increase in the participation of Azerbaijani girls in formal education.

It is important to note that these institutions operated under extremely limited financial conditions. They received no direct state funding and depended largely on private donations, charitable contributions, and the voluntary support of local philanthropists. Despite these difficulties, the schools continued to function and gradually expanded their educational activities.

During the early twentieth century, certain improvements were also observed in the field of secondary female education, particularly in gymnasiums and progymnasiums. By 1905, the number of female gymnasiums in Baku had increased significantly, and a primary Russian girls' school in Zagatala was reorganized into a Mariinsky Girls' School, reflecting the broader expansion of female educational institutions in the region (Mammadov, 1996).

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani girls remained a minority in these institutions. Statistical data illustrate the persistence of educational inequality. For example, in 1904, among 466 students studying at the well-known St. Nina Girls' Gymnasium in Baku, only six were Azerbaijani girls (Mardanov, 2011). This fact demonstrates that although institutional opportunities for female education were gradually expanding, Muslim girls continued to face significant social and cultural barriers to participation in formal education.

Archival reports from 1905 indicate that several private girls' schools were operating in Baku at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to official records, the city hosted at least two private female educational institutions: the Tutov School, which enrolled 224 students, and another girls' school directed by Zhotikova, which had 43 students (Rustamov, 2006). These institutions played an important role in supplementing the limited network of state educational establishments.

Official reports from the 1914-1915 academic year provide further evidence of the gradual expansion of female education in Azerbaijan. At that time, Baku had three primary schools for girls and one Russian-Muslim secondary school. The number of students enrolled in these institutions was steadily increasing: 440 students attended the first school, 463 students the second, 50 students the third, and 104 students were enrolled in the Russian-Muslim secondary school (Mardanov, 2011).

In addition to these institutions, various charitable organizations also made significant contributions to the development of women's education. For instance, the Nashri-Marif Society, an influential educational and cultural organization, opened two elementary schools for Muslim girls in Balakhani in 1914 and in Zabrat in 1915. These schools enrolled a total of 123 female students, demonstrating the increasing role of civic initiatives in promoting female education (Mardanov, 2011).

The network of specialized schools for Muslim girls gradually expanded across different regions of Azerbaijan. New educational institutions were established in Agdash in 1909, with the support of the Saadat Society, and later in Agdam in 1910, Shamakhi in 1911, and Malibeyli in the Shusha district in 1910. In addition, mixed schools, where boys and girls studied together, were opened in several localities, including Karkhabazar (1911), Zayama (1912), Jabrayil (1912), Sheki (1912), and Gazakh (1912) (Mammadov, 1996).

The number of schools for girls established in Azerbaijan before 1917 was not limited to these examples. Numerous other educational initiatives were implemented in different parts of the country, reflecting the growing demand for female education within Azerbaijani society.

One of the most pressing issues that emerged during this period was the need to establish teacher training institutions capable of preparing qualified female teachers for girls' schools. The rapid expansion of female educational institutions created a significant shortage of trained teaching personnel. Although the issue of establishing a pedagogical seminary for women was repeatedly raised before the imperial authorities, these efforts unfortunately did not lead to the creation of such an institution before the collapse of the Russian Empire.

A new stage in the development of women's education began during the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920). Despite its short existence, the government of the republic paid considerable attention to the development of education, including the education of women. Historical sources indicate that by 1919, Azerbaijan had 23 state secondary schools, including three St. Nina girls' schools and four female gymnasiums (Address Calendar of the Azerbaijan Republic, 1920).

During the existence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the national parliament adopted 19 legislative acts related to education, many of which addressed the educational rights of Azerbaijani women. These reforms aimed to expand access to education, promote the nationalization of educational institutions, and strengthen the training of teaching personnel.

One of the most serious challenges faced by the educational system was the shortage of nationally trained female teachers. This deficit significantly limited the expansion of girls' schools. In response to this problem, the government initiated a series of measures aimed at preparing female teachers. The first special training courses for women teachers were opened in Baku in October 1917, and similar programs were introduced again in 1918. These initiatives played an important role in preparing a new generation of educators capable of teaching in girls' schools.

Another important reform was the nationalization of the lower classes of female gymnasiums, which represented a step toward the broader nationalization of girls' schools and the development of a national education system.

The Development and Legacy of Women's Education in Azerbaijan

Although the early initiatives aimed at promoting women's education initially faced significant obstacles, the intellectual and social efforts of Azerbaijani reformers gradually began to produce tangible results. Over time, the ideas promoted by progressive educators and public figures began to manifest themselves in practical developments within the educational system. New educational institutions for girls were established, the number of female students steadily increased, and women gradually began to participate more actively in the social and cultural life of Azerbaijani society (Mardanov, 2011; Mammadov, 1996).

The progress achieved in the field of women's education was particularly noticeable during the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Between 1918 and 1920, the newly established national government adopted a series of progressive measures aimed at expanding the educational and social rights of women. These reforms encouraged women's participation in education, cultural activities, and broader social processes. Educational reforms undertaken during this period were designed to ensure equal access to schooling and to integrate women more actively into the intellectual and cultural life of the nation (Mardanov, 2011; Altstadt, 1992).

The transformation continued during the Soviet period, when women were formally granted equal legal rights with men in political, social, and educational spheres. Soviet educational policies placed strong emphasis on universal literacy and gender equality in education, which significantly increased female participation in schools, universities, and professional life. As a result, women gradually became fully integrated members of society, actively contributing to the economic, cultural, and intellectual development of Azerbaijan (Heyat, 2002; Swietochowski, 2004).

In contemporary Azerbaijan, women occupy an important and respected position in society and actively participate in all spheres of public life, including education, politics, science, culture, and business. Their active role in modern Azerbaijani society can be viewed as a long-term outcome of the intellectual and reformist activities carried out by progressive Azerbaijani thinkers and educators during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The theoretical and practical efforts of these intellectuals laid the ideological and institutional foundations for the advancement of women's rights and education in the country (Rustamov, 2006; Mardanov, 2011).

Thus, the first decades of the twentieth century were characterized by extensive intellectual and practical work aimed at promoting women's education in Azerbaijan. During this period, the conceptual and institutional foundations of female education were established, enabling further achievements in subsequent decades. Without these early initiatives, the later expansion of women's educational opportunities during the Soviet era would have been far more difficult to achieve.

The Contribution of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade to the Advancement of Women's Education

One of the most active and consistent national leaders who addressed the issue of women's education during the period of Azerbaijan's national awakening was Mahammad Amin Rasulzade. As one of the most prominent representatives of Azerbaijani political and intellectual thought in the early twentieth century, Rasulzade devoted considerable attention to the

question of women's social status and educational opportunities. Through numerous articles, speeches, and political writings published in different newspapers and journals, he consistently advocated the expansion of women's rights and access to education (Rasulzade, 1992).

Among Rasulzade's writings addressing this issue are several influential articles and speeches published in leading periodicals of the time. These include *"The Second Congress of Teachers"* published in *Taza Hayat* on 22 August 1907, *"The Right Path"* in *Iqbal* on 4 June 1913, *"The Light of Hope"* in *Iqbal* on 17 June 1913, and the series of articles titled *"Women in Turkey"* published in *Iqbal* between June and July 1913. Additional writings such as *"The Veil Problem"* in *Basirat* (1914), *"Muslim Charitable Society"* in *Iqbal* (1914), *"Not in Negligence"* in *Achig Soz* (1917), and his commentary on the All-Russian Muslim Congress in *Achig Soz* during 1917 also addressed various aspects of women's education and participation in public life (Rasulzade, 1992).

These publications demonstrate that the issue of women's education occupied an important place within Rasulzade's broader vision of national modernization and social progress. In his writings, the question of women's status was closely connected with the development of national consciousness, democratic values, and social reform. Rasulzade argued that a nation's progress was inseparable from the intellectual and moral development of its women.

Rasulzade approached the issue from multiple perspectives. He analyzed the role of women within the family, their influence on the upbringing of future generations, their participation in social and political life, and their access to education and professional activities. For Rasulzade, the woman question was not merely a domestic matter but a fundamental issue related to nation-building and cultural modernization (Altstadt, 1992).

According to Rasulzade, the establishment of schools for Muslim girls represented one of the most urgent tasks facing Azerbaijani society. He emphasized that educated women constituted the most important hope for the progress of society. In his view, the intellectual and moral condition of families directly determined the strength of the nation. A society in which women remained uneducated and socially marginalized could not achieve sustainable development or compete with more progressive nations.

Rasulzade repeatedly stressed that women constitute nearly half of the population of any nation. If women remain deprived of education and intellectual development, then half of the nation's potential remains unrealized. Consequently, the advancement of women's education was not simply a matter of social justice but a strategic requirement for national progress.

Another important aspect of Rasulzade's position concerned the role of the press and intellectuals in promoting women's education. He argued that newspapers, journals, writers, and educators should actively advocate the importance of women's rights and educational opportunities. The press, in particular, should serve as a platform for public enlightenment by explaining the necessity of reform and encouraging society to reconsider traditional attitudes toward women (Rasulzade, 1992).

Rasulzade also supported the establishment of women's charitable organizations that could assist Muslim girls in obtaining education and protect women's rights within society. Such organizations, he believed, could contribute to the development of a new civic culture based on education, equality, and social responsibility.

A particularly significant dimension of Rasulzade's ideas emerged after the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia. In the new political environment created by the collapse of autocratic rule, Rasulzade advocated the recognition of full political rights for Muslim women, including the right to vote and participate in elections. He believed that the political participation of women was essential for the democratic development of society and the successful realization of national aspirations (Swietochowski, 2004).

Other Intellectual Contributions to the Women's Education Movement

The issue of women's education was also addressed by several other prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals of the early twentieth century, including Ahmad bey Agaoglu, Nariman Narimanov, Uzeyir Hajibeyli, Abdulla Shaig, and Yusif Vezir Chamanzaminli. In their works, the woman question was treated as one of the most urgent problems of their time.

Among these thinkers, Ahmad bey Agaoglu made particularly significant contributions to the intellectual discussion of women's rights. In his influential brochure *"Akhund, Islam and Hatif al-Ghayb,"* published in 1904, Agaoglu strongly condemned violence against women and criticized social norms that justified female subordination. He argued that the physical and psychological abuse of women represented a manifestation of cultural backwardness incompatible with the ideals of freedom, justice, and civilization (Agaoglu, 2007).

Agaoglu maintained that a society that tolerates the humiliation of women cannot claim to be enlightened or progressive. His writings emphasized the moral responsibility of society to respect women's dignity and provide them with educational opportunities.

Overall Significance

The works of Rasulzade and other Azerbaijani intellectuals clearly demonstrate that the struggle for women's education formed an integral part of the broader enlightenment movement in Azerbaijan. Their writings helped transform public opinion and gradually created the intellectual foundations for modern educational reforms.

By the early twentieth century, the issue of women's education had become one of the central topics within Azerbaijani intellectual discourse. Progressive educators and thinkers understood that without the participation of women in education, science, and public life, the nation could not achieve genuine modernization or cultural renewal.

Intellectual Discourses on Women's Education in Early Twentieth-Century Azerbaijan

Another influential Azerbaijani intellectual who approached the issue of women's education with profound emotional and pedagogical sensitivity was Yusif Vezir Chamanzaminli. Chamanzaminli, a prominent writer, diplomat, and public thinker, devoted considerable attention to the social position, rights, and intellectual development of women in Azerbaijani society. Through his journalistic writings, essays, and literary works, he consistently addressed the necessity of improving women's educational opportunities and social status during a period when traditional norms often restricted female participation in public life (Rustamov, 2006; Mardanov, 2011).

Chamanzaminli's pedagogical views are particularly evident in his enlightening treatise *Mother and Motherhood*, written in 1914. In the introductory section of this work, the author explains that the "woman question" had occupied his intellectual reflections for many years. This long-standing concern motivated him to produce a series of journalistic and literary works devoted to women's issues, including essays such as *Our Women* and *Bloody Tears*, as well as several short stories that depict the hardships faced by women within traditional social structures. These works explore themes such as female suffering, family relations, gender inequality, and the consequences of social injustice (Chamanzaminli, 1914; Gasimzade, 1974).

In Chamanzaminli's thought, the concept of motherhood occupies a central place, yet he does not approach it merely from a biological perspective. Instead, he interprets motherhood as a cultural, moral, and pedagogical institution that shapes the ethical foundations of society. According to Chamanzaminli, the mother represents the first educator of the child and therefore plays a decisive role in the intellectual and moral formation of future generations. From this perspective, the education of women becomes a matter of national importance rather than a purely domestic concern. If mothers remain deprived of education and intellectual development, the nation itself cannot develop a strong moral and cultural foundation (Rustamov, 2006).

Chamanzaminli's ideas were not isolated. They reflected a broader intellectual consensus among Azerbaijani reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who believed that female education constituted one of the most important prerequisites for national progress and cultural modernization (Altstadt, 1992; Swietochowski, 2004). Azerbaijani intellectuals increasingly understood that the intellectual development of society depended on the educational level of mothers, since they were primarily responsible for the upbringing of children during their early formative years.

The growing significance of the "woman question" in Azerbaijani society is also demonstrated by the appearance of several books published in Baku during the early twentieth century that addressed women's rights, education, and social status. These works attempted to explain women's legal and moral position within society and to inform female readers about their rights within the framework of Islamic law and social ethics. Among such publications were *Discipline of Women* (translated from Arabic, 1902), *Islamic Women and Madame Olga* (translated from Persian, 1911), Rashid bey Efendiyev's *The Wife* (1912), Basir Nemat Hajiyev's *Mir Nervan* (1914), and M. Ilyaszade's *The Contribution of Religion to the Wives of Islam* (1914). Although these works differed significantly in their ideological orientation and intellectual quality, they collectively demonstrate the increasing visibility of the issue of women's education within the public sphere (Rustamov, 1995; Mardanov, 2011).

The expansion of intellectual discourse surrounding women's education was also reflected in the growing number of educational journals and pedagogical periodicals published during this period. Publications such as *Dabistan* (1906–1908), *Rahbar* (1906–1907), and *Maktab* (1911–1920) regularly included articles, stories, poems, and pedagogical commentaries devoted to the role of women in family life, their educational opportunities, and their contribution to the moral development of society. These journals played an especially important role in shaping pedagogical thought because they were primarily directed toward teachers, students, and the emerging intellectual youth of the nation (Rustamov, 2006).

Through such publications, the idea gradually gained wider acceptance that women's education was essential not only for personal intellectual development but also for the cultivation of national consciousness, ethical values, and civic responsibility. Educational journals functioned as instruments of moral education and social enlightenment, disseminating progressive ideas among teachers, students, and the broader public. In doing so, they contributed significantly to the formation of a new pedagogical culture in Azerbaijan—one that increasingly recognized educated women as an essential component of national progress and social modernization (Mardanov, 2011; Khalid, 1998).

The intellectual efforts of Azerbaijani reformers gradually transformed public attitudes toward women's education. By the early twentieth century, the issue had evolved from a marginal social concern into a central topic within Azerbaijani intellectual and political discourse. Writers, journalists, educators, and political thinkers began to recognize that the modernization of

society required not only educational reforms but also the transformation of traditional attitudes toward women's roles in society (Altstadt, 1992).

Taken together, the writings of prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals—including Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, Yusif Vezir Chamanzaminli, Ahmad bey Agaoglu, and many others—demonstrate that the struggle for women's education had, by the early twentieth century, developed into a comprehensive intellectual movement encompassing pedagogical, cultural, legal, and political dimensions. The “woman question” was no longer confined to discussions about domestic life or moral conduct. Instead, it had become a key issue connected with national survival, social progress, and historical transformation (Swietochowski, 2004).

Azerbaijani educators and intellectuals increasingly recognized that without the education, freedom, and civic participation of women, it would be impossible to achieve genuine enlightenment or to construct a modern, just, and democratic society. Consequently, the promotion of women's education became one of the central pillars of the Azerbaijani enlightenment movement and played a decisive role in shaping the intellectual foundations of the country's modern educational system (Rustamov, 2006; Mardanov, 2011).

Findings

The analysis conducted in this study demonstrates that the issue of women's education in Azerbaijan emerged as a central component of the broader intellectual and cultural transformation that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Azerbaijani educators and intellectuals recognized that the modernization of society required a fundamental reconsideration of women's social status and educational opportunities. The exclusion of women from education and public life was increasingly viewed as one of the principal causes of social stagnation and cultural backwardness in Muslim societies of the period (Mardanov, 2011; Rustamov, 2006).

One of the most significant findings of the research is that the struggle for women's education in Azerbaijan was closely connected with the national enlightenment movement that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Progressive intellectuals understood that education represented the primary mechanism for overcoming ignorance and promoting social reform. Consequently, they regarded the education of women not only as a pedagogical issue but also as a national and cultural imperative (Altstadt, 1992).

The study also shows that the foundations of this movement were laid by prominent Azerbaijani thinkers such as Mirza Fatali Akhundov, whose writings exposed the social injustices faced by women and called for modernization and enlightenment. Later, other intellectuals associated with the newspaper *Akinchi*, including Hasan bey Zardabi, further developed these ideas and actively advocated the expansion of educational opportunities for women.

The research further reveals that the Azerbaijani press played a crucial role in shaping public opinion on the issue of women's education. Newspapers and journals such as *Molla Nasreddin* and *Fuyuzat* became important platforms for discussing gender inequality and promoting educational reform. Through satire, journalism, and intellectual debate, these publications exposed the social injustices faced by women and emphasized the necessity of granting them access to education and social participation (Swietochowski, 2004).

Another important finding concerns the practical steps taken toward the institutionalization of female education. Beginning in the early twentieth century, several educational institutions for girls were established in different regions of Azerbaijan. The opening of the Russian-Muslim Girls' School in Baku in 1901, financed by the philanthropist Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev, marked a major turning point in the history of women's education in the Caucasus. Similar initiatives gradually expanded the network of educational institutions for girls and increased the number of female students (Mammadov, 1996).

The research also highlights the significant contributions of Azerbaijani intellectuals such as Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, Ahmad bey Agaoglu, and Yusif Vezir Chamanzaminli, who addressed the issue of women's education from political, philosophical, and pedagogical perspectives. These thinkers argued that the progress of society depended directly on the education of women, since mothers played a crucial role in the upbringing of future generations.

Finally, the study shows that the educational reforms initiated by Azerbaijani intellectuals during the early twentieth century laid the groundwork for the later expansion of women's education during the Soviet period. Although many early initiatives faced political and social obstacles, they established the intellectual and institutional foundations for the development of gender equality in education.

Conclusion

The historical analysis presented in this study confirms that the development of women's education in Azerbaijan was the result of a long and complex process shaped by intellectual debates, social reforms, and educational initiatives. During the nineteenth century, Azerbaijani society faced significant challenges, including widespread illiteracy, traditional social norms, and limited educational opportunities for women. However, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, progressive Azerbaijani intellectuals initiated a movement aimed at overcoming these obstacles and promoting national enlightenment.

Within this broader intellectual movement, the issue of women's education gradually emerged as one of the most important priorities. Azerbaijani educators and reformers understood that the modernization of society required the participation of women in education, culture, and public life. Without the intellectual and moral development of women, it would be impossible to achieve sustainable social progress.

The contributions of leading intellectuals—including Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Hasan bey Zardabi, Ahmad bey Agaoglu, Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, and Yusif Vezir Chamanzaminli—played a decisive role in transforming public attitudes toward women's education. Through their writings, educational initiatives, and political activities, they helped establish the ideological foundations for gender equality in education.

By the early twentieth century, these ideas had begun to produce practical results. Schools for girls were gradually established, the number of female students increased, and women began to participate more actively in social and cultural life. The reforms implemented during the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic further strengthened the principles of educational equality and expanded opportunities for women's participation in national development.

The achievements of the Soviet period, which introduced universal literacy and formal gender equality in education, were built upon the intellectual and institutional foundations established by earlier Azerbaijani reformers. Today, women in Azerbaijan actively participate in all spheres of public life, including education, science, politics, and culture.

Therefore, the historical struggle for women's education in Azerbaijan should be understood not only as an educational reform but also as a crucial component of the country's national modernization process. The intellectual efforts of Azerbaijani educators during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries laid the groundwork for the contemporary development of gender equality in education and continue to influence the social and cultural progress of the nation.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with internationally recognized academic and ethical standards. The study is based exclusively on historical sources, published academic literature, and archival materials. No experiments involving human participants or animals were conducted during the research process.

All sources used in the preparation of this article have been properly acknowledged and cited in accordance with academic integrity principles. The author confirms that the work is original and has not been previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere. The research adheres to the ethical principles of scientific research, including honesty, transparency, and respect for intellectual property.

In addition, the study respects the ethical guidelines established for historical and pedagogical research, particularly in the use and interpretation of archival materials and historical documents.

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